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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 001523

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PL](#)  
SUBJECT: THE (LAST?) BATTLE FOR PUBLIC MEDIA IN POLAND

REF: A. WARSAW 05 03720  
[1](#)B. WARSAW 05 04079

SBU: NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION

SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (SBU) Journalists and media observers continue to bemoan the perceived loss of independence for public media. While Polish Public media has ebbed and flowed with majority politics since 1989 never has the division between politicians and media been drawn in such sharp relief. The dust is settling in the appointments fury following the announcement of a coalition government between ruling Law and Justice (PIS), Self-Defense (SO) and the League of Polish Families (LPR). For the first time since independence in 1989 no opposition party holds a seat on the Boards of Directors for public television, public radio, the Polish Press Agency nor the powerful National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT). This unique situation was brought on by the PIS sweep of the Presidency, Senate, and Parliament in conjunction with a new media law run through Parliament in record time in late 2005 (see Reftel B). The cantankerous environment has reached its apex with SO Chairman and Deputy Prime Minister Andrzej Lepper calling for TVP President Bronislaw Wildstein's dismissal over Wildstein's refusal to name SO's candidate director of TVP 3 regional television; a critical slot to guarantee positive rural coverage before local elections in November. Andrzej Mietkowski, head of TVP news and former President of the Polish News Bulletin, put it bluntly: "I see the future of TVP in dark colors."

APPOINTMENTS  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) As is customary in many democracies, like our own, political appointments of supporters is nothing new. What makes the situation for public media in Poland unique is the

unprecedented PIS dominance across the government spectrum. The Boards of Directors for public media have representatives from the Senate, Parliament, and Presidency. Since Poland's first freely elected government in 1989, no one party has wielded the majority in all three branches of government. The Boards of Directors are directly responsible for naming the supervisory boards which work in cooperation with the President of each organ (Radio, TV, Press Agency) to appoint directors. In addition, the new media law passed in December 2005 dissolved the National Broadcast Council (KRRiT) and reduced its membership from nine to five. Members that previously rotated two at a time for six-year terms were swept aside and replaced with an entirely new (coalition) five member board. Hence, in a matter of six months, all public media power positions have been replaced by PIS or one of its coalition partners.

¶3. (SBU) LPR appointee to the Board of Directors at TVP, Piotr Farfal, remains in his post despite media revelations last month that he published a neo-Nazi newspaper as a teenager. Farfal offered his resignation to the KRRiT board, but they have, as yet, to act. Farfal, a 28 year old who finished law school last year, is a notable example of the ongoing politicization of public media jobs, and the failure of any coalition party to vet candidates for virulently anti-Semitic views that would bar their appointment in most countries.

WILDSTEIN

¶4. (SBU) One of the most influential appointments in Poland is the President of Public Television. Public Television still holds over 60% of the viewer market in Poland, rates higher than that for news and current events, and traditionally rates highest in public opinion polls on credibility and reliability of information. PIS named Bronislaw Wildstein President of TVP. Wildstein is a widely respected right-leaning journalist famous for publicizing a number of secret communist era security files exposing communist sympathizers. The term "Wildstein's list" is now synonymous in Poland with the archives at the National Remembrance Institute. Being suspected of inclusion on "Wildstein's list" can be the political death knell for public figures. His "anti-Communist", "anti-corruption", reputation and right leaning politics fit well with the ruling PIS party while naming a respected journalism professional appeased the media community with whom PIS has a hate/hate relationship. Wildstein is in a tough position now as political pressures mount against what many feel is the integrity of TVP. Boleslaw Sulik, a former KRRiT chairman and current employee of TVP's film production agency, told post that "TVP has always been politicized but I don't remember the situation ever being as bad as it is currently. We allow Jaroslaw Kaczynski to say absurd things without a reaction. Everything he does, whether Lepper, Giertych, Radio Maryja, all those absurd things he says should be considered publicly as extremely cynical political thinking." On the flip side, SO Deputy Krzysztof Filippek has been quoted as saying, "President Wildstein has been repeating that he will not allow any politician to manage TVP. He has forgotten that he was nominated thanks to political agreement."

¶5. (SBU) For his own part, Wildstein has said he would strive to keep his post at TVP until the current Sejm (Parliament) term ends. He has also proven that he is not totally malleable to political ends though by blocking the preferred coalition choices for key directorships at TVP 1 and TVP 3. "It is my role to give it (television) independence and watch how it carries out its mission," he said. In support of Wildstein the Polish Journalists' Association adopted a resolution against "politicians breaching media law that in no section gives them the right to intervene in the operations of public media."

COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) If Wildstein is dismissed (far from inconceivable in today's topsy-turvy Polish politics) the media hailstorm released against the ruling coalition will dwarf any previous squabbles. Journalists see Wildstein as the last check for media independence. Post suspects that PIS leaders are too savvy to allow that, however, and in fact are secretly not opposed to Wildstein's blocking of key directorships for their coalition partners. As reported, it is widely accepted that PIS strategy consists of a plan to swallow up its coalition members on the right. Having SO control regional television in the run-up to local elections would hardly fit with that strategy and the last thing the Kaczynski twins need at this juncture is to further alienate the press. End Comment.

HILLAS